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ABSTRACT

The acquisition of Standard English by speakers of other languages and by speakers of non-standard dialects seems to differ (1) in motivation, (2) in the perception of Standard English, (3) in the social significance of Standard English, (4) in the cultural heritage and its influence on man's identity and self-respect, (5) in the source language/dialect as a system, (6) in deep structures, and (7) in matters of performance. Because they differ in more ways than they agree, their teaching methodologies should not be the same. A modified ESOL approach is suggested for teaching Standard English to speakers of Black English: this teaching should be based on a cross-disciplinary approach that helps the learner overcome the barriers resulting from sources other than linguistic ones. Major emphasis should be placed on the fact that the speaker of non-standard English is a native speaker of the language; rather than seeking competence in a language unknown to him, he wishes to acquire new ways of performing in the same language. Discussed is the State University of New York College at Cortland's graduate program in English sociolinguistics for prospective and experienced English teachers, which offers training in both English for speakers of other languages and Standard English for speakers of a non-standard dialect, with special attention on the latter. (AMM)

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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES AND/OR DIALECTS -- AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION

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0. Introduction

It has been assumed that the teaching of English to speakers of other languages and the teaching of Standard English to speakers of a non-standard dialect have very many common traits. In light of this assumption it has been suggested that identical or at least very similar techniques can be used to teach English to both. On the other hand, there are differences between the acquisition of English by a speaker of a language other than English and such acquisition by a speaker of a non-standard dialect. It is therefore the object of this study to examine some of the differences between the acquisition of a second language and that of a second dialect and to suggest, very tentatively, what directions should be taken in the future to determine the extent to which second language methodology can safely be used in the teaching of a second dialect.

1. Standard English, a common goal

1.1 Standardization of a language

In his study of language standardization, Punya S. Ray asserts that

> we ordinarily speak of standardization in relation to tools. . . .When this concept is applied to languages, we stress their toollike character: A language is from this point of view only an instrument of communication, not a symbol of revelation, only a means, not an end. And we pursue the analogy to raise questions about cheapness, dependability and uniformity.

Thus, the standard dialect of language X owes its status, not to its linguistic quality, but to the need for an economical, dependable and uniform tool of communication. Hence, the standard dialect, say, Standard American English, merely reflects the arbitrary choice by its speakers depending upon the external history and should therefore be assessed accordingly.

1.2 Standard English, reality or abstraction

Standard English may be defined as the kind of English that is spoken

by the educated man in this country. We hear it in schools and offices, in law courts and science labs and yet it is difficult for us to pinpoint the exact degree of uniformity that we require of a person's speech to identify it as standard. We do permit a certain number of regional phonological features and even lexical peculiarities but we reject all so-called grammatical violations. On the other hand, we may occasionally accept certain grammatical oddities when they are slips of the tongue or intentional distortions. And yet, we all know when a man speaks Standard English and when he does not. Standard English appears to be an abstract notion depending upon, not the total observance of a given set of features, but rather the high percentage of such observance. And in effect, Labov has shown that the speaker of Middle Class English has at times a number of features in his speech that would qualify for Non-standard English but the rareness of the occurrence of such features prevents us from identifying such a man as speaker of a non-standard dialect.[2]

1.3 Standard English and the speaker of other languages

Whether a reality or merely an abstraction, Standard English is the variety of English which the speaker of other languages expects to learn. The foreign national as well as the member of a non-English speaking minority have both set for themselves the goal of learning the "most dependable and uniform" variety of English in order to communicate effectively with Americans or English speaking fellow-citizens, as the case may be. Even if they knew in advance that they would communicate mostly with New Englanders or that they would live in the inner city, their goal would still be Standard English and not the eastern variety of the Northern Dialect or the type of English spoken by the Black population in our urban centers. On the other hand, if these speakers of another language should fail to master Standard English, their speech does not qualify as a non-standard dialect of English

but will be considered broken English, a form of English that is marked by interferences from another language. As a general rule, the speaker of another language is not consciously aware of the fact that his goal is to speak Standard English. For him, Standard English is just English because the variety of English that he is trying to learn does not carry any social significance.

1.4 Standard English and the native speaker

The native speaker of English in America is usually conscious of the socio-economic class to which he belongs. By the same token, he is interested in the class membership of the person with whom he speaks and tries to identify him socially by means of the dialect that such a person uses. The identification of a man's class dialect represents, at the same time, a disguised value judgment of the man himself. More specifically, the speaker of Standard English tends to reject a person belonging to a lower socio-economic class or a different ethnic group under the pretense of rejecting him because of his failure to speak the prestige dialect. As a result, a person's use of non-standard English becomes a question of social status and so does the use of Standard English. The acquisition of Standard English is therefore no longer merely a question of another speech type but becomes a matter of social identity. Thus, motivation to learn surpasses in importance the ability to learn, obviously the reverse situation of what is the case for the non-native speaker.

2. Psychological aspects of the acquisition of English

2.1 Motivation

Motivation is crucial in any learning process. Two distinct forces may block a person's motivation to learn Standard English, his indifference or his outspoken hostility, of which the latter is more difficult to overcome

than the former. Different reasons have been given to justify why a speaker of a non-standard dialect should learn the prestige dialect, i.e., to improve his economic level, to move up on the social scale, to increase his educational achievements, but none of these is convincing because no promise can actually be made to the effect that, if he learns Standard English, he will get a better position or a higher salary, that he will be accepted without reluctance to become a member of a higher social class or that he will encounter no difficulties whatsoever in climbing the ladder of educational achievements. It seems therefore unrealistic to stimulate his interest or to try to overcome his hostility by making promises whose fulfillment lies beyond our control. It is only in our own attitude to language, to dialects, to racial issues that we can motivate our students. A closer human relationship, an understanding of their problems, an awareness of their cultural and linguistic identity seems to be the only means to promote the motivation which is the necessary condition for the acquisition of Standard English.

Motivation is usually of a much lesser magnitude for the speaker of another language. If he wishes at all to communicate with an English speaking person, he is already sufficiently motivated to learn the language. On the other hand, he may not need or wish to communicate with a native speaker of English. A foreign national, for example, whose political views differ significantly from those in the United States, may not wish to learn the language spoken in this country, expressing by means of this refusal his own political view. I have often found this attitude in Latin-American schools. Thus, we have here a comparable negative attitude toward Standard English, not because of the student's class consciousness, but because of certain nationalistic tendencies abroad. Motivation can be promoted also here, if the teacher has the right attitude to language, recognizes objectively the value of the two languages and the two cultures and succeeds in making a

clear distinction between language and politics. The defense of political views should obviously be divorced from language instruction abroad when an interest in English as a language is to be promoted.

2.2 Perception and production

There are reasons to believe that the speaker of a non-standard dialect decodes both the standard dialect, which he hears in schools and offices, and his own non-standard dialect, which he speaks at home and with his friends on the street. To encode a message, however, the non-standard speaker uses only the vernacular. Some scholars suggest that this is an indication of the fact that the encoding process is not necessarily the inverse of the decoding process. On the other hand, we must take into consideration that a Non-standard English speaking individual is constantly exposed to Standard English and can probably not help but learn how to decode it. The lack of motivation to learn Standard English seems never to be strong enough to prevent a person from trying to understand what is being said. Class consciousness does not enter into play, since successful decoding does not have to be revealed.

The speaker of another language is in a less fortunate position, although it can be assumed that he is more likely to be successful in the decoding than in the encoding process. To be sure, instructors of English as a second language know how difficult it is for their students to perform well in an oral comprehension exercise carried on at normal, that is, native speed but the learner is relatively better off when he tries to understand than when he speaks.

3. <u>Sociological aspects</u>

3.1 Language and dialect

The distinction between languages and dialects is a moot question.

The traditional argument on the basis of mutual intelligibility is too semantically oriented and the fact that national boundaries often cut through territories with ethnically related populations complicates this issue even further. The recent attempt of American sociolinguists to correlate language with competence and dialect with performance brings us into the realm of far more promising deliberations. As a matter of fact, Labov's conclusions in this respect

> agree with the general point of view expressed by Chomsky that dialects of a language are apt to differ from each other in low-level rules, and that superficial differences are greater than those differences found (if any) in their deep structures.

Let us therefore assume, at least for the purpose of this discussion, that a given language, say, English, is the overall linguistic system and that a dialect, any dialect of English, is the superficial manifestation of that system conditioned by the geographic, social, functional or occupational forces that act upon it.

3.2 Geographic and social dialects

Geographic dialects are easy to understand. The common man in America travels widely and experiences personally the regional variations as they occur here and elsewhere. The American mobility has helped appreciate more fully many of the findings in present-day dialect geography. Social dialects are more difficult to understand because they are not as easy to verify. An individual does not usually move up or down the social scale, hence the data of Labov, Shuy or Stewart are mostly unfamiliar to members of other social strata. A deeper understanding of social dialect differences can easily be achieved, if the general attitude regarding <u>social</u> dialects changes. Even among the data gathered by <u>regional</u> dialect geographers, several features are also socially significant. As a result, the geographic and social aspects of our rural dialects could easily promote an

increased interest in the social dialects of urban centers.

3.3 Prestige dialect, -- language or dialect

It still is quite common to think in terms of a standard language and one or more non-standard dialects. Language seems to stand here for _good_, _acceptable_ and _dialect_ for _bad_, _sloppy_ and _lazy_. It is true, we have substituted the prefix _sub-_ for the more neutral _non-_ but the language-dialect dichotomy, as it is currently used, still perpetuates the old fallacy. If we do not mean it, let us be careful in our choice of words.

4. Cultural aspects

4.1 Foreign culture

The foreign national who is a speaker of a language other than English is a product of his own native culture. He identifies himself as such and shows by means of his behavioral patterns that he understands and respects his traditions. Identity and self-respect are therefore not at issue. The acquisition of a new language is not a cultural problem because he does not intend to give up his own cultural framework and to substitute the target culture for it. The English instructor, here as well as abroad, does not question the value of the learner's native culture, taking it for granted that the latter will absorb in his classes as much cultural and linguistic information as is possible without relinquishing his native cultural patterns.

4.2 Non-English heritage

The member of a non-English speaking minority, such as the Mexican-American, the Puerto Rican, the American Indian, holds, culturally speaking, a somewhat weaker position in that his self-identity and self-respect depend to a great extent upon the strength of his own tradition and his ability not to jeopardize his group membership by his desire to learn English. In other words, his cultural security is dependent upon finding a compromise formula by which he sees himself as a member of a pluralistic society who, at the

same time, is loyal to his native language and culture, is a citizen of this country and speaks the language of the majority.

The member of the black community holds the weakest position for a number of reasons. His culture has not yet been defined very clearly. Although his African heritage is known, systematic studies tracing the cultural and linguistic developments of the American Negro are still very few. More research in this field is needed to describe the historical sources of Black English.

4.3 Identity and self-respect in light of cultural background

A man's identity and his self-respect seem to emerge as significant factors to promote his motivation to learn English as a second language or Standard English as a second dialect. The strength of the belief in one's own culture and the respect for his own speech remove the emotional barriers that prevent him from wishing to learn Standard English. Once these barriers are removed, the prestige dialect ceases to be White Man's talk and becomes the general tool of communication for which alone a standard dialect is intended. Hence, the greater respect for Black English, one of the most outstanding traits of modern sociolinguistics, could eventually lead to a broader acceptance of Standard English. The just appraisal of the home talk will increase the learner's interest in the school talk, a fact that might lead to the production of a large number of bidialectal speakers, who, without reluctance or apprehension, would be able to shift from one dialect to the other just as a bilingual speaker shifts from one language to the other without often remembering when and why he shifted and which language he had spoken when he conveyed a certain message.

5. Linguistic aspects

5.1 The source language or dialect as a linguistic system

It is a well known fact that modern second language teaching

methodology owes a great deal to the recent studies in contrastive linguistics. Thus, second language teaching materials are based on the assumption that the source language, that is the learner's native language, is a self-contained linguistic system and the target language is an equally independent system. Our goal as teachers of English as a second language is, accordingly, to enable our students to transfer from their native speech to Standard English with a minimum of phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical interferences. Whether we accomplish this by using a structural or a transformational approach may be significant in a number of ways[4] but does not alter the issue regarding the systemic difference between the two languages: two different languages are two distinct linguistic systems. When we deal with two dialects of the same language, the situation is no longer obvious. Taken in isolation, a non-standard dialect, say, Black English, is of course a system in its own right, just as Spanish or French or an American Indian language. Compared to another English dialect, such as Standard English, Black English appears to be closely related to it, such that the difference between the two dialects only seems to involve the restructuring and possibly reordering of a relatively small number of rules which affect very little the deep structure of English. Labov argues to this effect that, when we look at English dialects from the viewpoint of similarity rather than differentiation,

> the differences do not appear very great. They are largely confined to superficial, rather low-level processes which have little effect on meaning.[5]

Since the main body of dialect differences seem not to affect the semantic or "deep structure" level, he finds it

> increasingly plausible to write pan-dialectal grammars in which the differences between the various dialects will appear as stages in the evolution of the language as a whole -- to some extent in a linear series, but also as a set of parallel and competing lines of development.[6]

All this seems to lead to the realization that Standard English and the non-standard dialects of English are not isolated systems but rather subsystems of the same language.

5.2 Deep and surface structure differences

Several sociolinguistic studies based upon the dialect data gathered in Detroit, New York City and Washington support this view that most of the distinctive features of Black English represent only surface structure differences. On the other hand, constructions such as he always be foolin' around,[7] he with us, this is John mother, axe Albert do he know how to play baseball[8] seem to go much deeper. Standard English he is with us contrasts with Black English he with us to the effect that the BE-copula occurs in the former but not in the latter. The absence of the copula in Black English has been compared to the absence of the copula in languages like Russian. Therefore, if we consider, in a contrastive study of English and Russian, that the presence or absence of the copula constitutes -- as I think we do -- a deep structure difference, then we should do the same when we contrast Standard and Black English. The degree of depth, of course, may vary in a non-standard dialect and we may hold that the pair axe Albert do he know how to play baseball vs. ask Albert if he knows how to play baseball illustrates a deeper contrast than the pair this is John mother vs. this is John's mother. It is therefore quite possible that future research in sociolinguistics will show that two subsystems, in addition to differing in surface structure, also possess a number of deeper oppositions at various crucial points of the entire grammatical system.

Deep structure differences between English and, say, Spanish or French are of course quite obvious. The difference between two language systems goes all the way down from deep structure to the physical manifestation of the speaker's performance. Hence the mastery of a second language can

only be achieved when the learner has acquired the "deep" knowledge of the target language together with the ability to project this knowledge to the surface.[9]

5.3 Competence and performance

Despite some deep structure differences between Standard English and Black English, it is however reasonable to assume that the two subsystems differ predominantly in their surface structures. In the discovery of surface differences, the social dialectologist has evidently gone in full circle and returned, regardless of his generative model, to the premise of structuralism that the grammar of a language can be discovered from a corpus. The revival of discovery procedures and the restriction of intuition may come as a shock to the theoretical generativist but the competent manipulation of data, not only by the generative dialectologist but also by the generative historical linguist, seems to suggest that the compromise between a careful analysis of physical data and a rule-oriented interpretation of these data can be very successful.

Performance as a starting point suggests itself as an appropriate procedure also in teaching, as long as the instructor goes beyond mere imitation and seeks to develop linguistic competence in his students.

6. Summary

6.1 Similarities in second language and second dialect acquisition

I have attempted to show some of the similarities and differences between the teaching of English to speakers of other languages and the teaching of Standard English to speakers of a non-standard dialect. The confrontation of the two approaches may have been disappointing for some but proved to be instructive for most. ESOL and SESOD are identical only in few aspects. Both are of course concerned with the acquisition of speech

patterns, both share the same specific goal, Standard English, and both involve, during its production, difficulties for the learner. This rather small list of similarities stands in contrast to a long list of differences, a fact that may suggest that a unified approach represents an oversimplification of our problem.

6.2 Differences between the two types of speech acquisition

The acquisition of Standard English by speakers of other languages and by speakers of a non-standard dialect seem to differ at least in seven ways, i.e., in motivation, in the perception of Standard English, in the social significance of Standard English, in the cultural heritage and its influence on man's identity and self-respect, in the source language/dialect as system, in deep structures, and in matters of performance. The limitation of time prevents me from restating these differences in detail. Such restatement may however be found in one of the handouts prepared for this presentation.

It seems logical at this point to suggest that, in view of the fact that ESOL and SESOD differ in more ways than agree, their methodologies should, by the same token, not be the same. The use of TESOL methods alone can therefore not be expected as panacea to teach Standard English to, say, speakers of Black English. A modified TESOL approach should therefore be conceived with a stronger focus on differences rather than similarities.

7. Toward a modified TESOL approach

The need for an independent SESOD methodology has prompted the State University of New York College at Cortland to design a graduate program in English sociolinguistics for prospective and experienced English teachers as well as for various types of liberal arts graduates. The College offers training in both areas, English to Speakers of Other Languages and Standard

English to Speakers of a Non-standard Dialect, but with special attention to the latter. The two specializations are taught in the same program because of some similarity between ESOL and SESOD but without implying that the same approach can serve in either case. Quite to the contrary, the students shall be alerted to the existing differences such that they may, as teachers of English as a second language, employ certain techniques and as teachers of Standard English to speakers of a non-standard dialect, certain others.

The Cortland Project differs from related programs in a number of ways:

(1) The curriculum is cross-disciplinary in nature and exposes the student to a variety of fields in order to broaden his background in psychological, sociological, cultural and linguistic matters;

(2) The program allows for nearly no electives. It is a very compact package within which the student can only take the courses that have been designed especially for this particular program;

(3) The "foreign language" requirement for this program can only be satisfied, if the Master's candidate has an average knowledge of the native language or dialect of his prospective students, hence Spanish, an American Indian language, Black English or a non-standard dialect from a rural community would all qualify;

(4) Field experience shall be provided, in particular for those whose interest lies in SESOD. They will observe classes in inner city schools, practice-teach there and may tutor persons enrolled in various regional programs for the disadvantaged;

(5) Research will be greatly encouraged. The students are expected to carry out, under the guidance of our staff, at least one major research project and submit the results of the investigation, in form of a term paper for the "Directed Study" Course, as partial requirement for the Master's degree. The data for this paper can be gathered on field trips or in libraries according to the inclination of each particular student.

To give the audience a more concise picture of the Cortland training program, I am directing your attention to the table showing the correlation between the various cross-disciplinary aspects on one hand and the titles and descriptions of the courses on the other (second page of handout).

8. Conclusion

It seems to follow that the teaching of Standard English to speakers of a non-standard dialect should be based on a cross-disciplinary approach that helps the learner overcome the barriers resulting from sources other than linguistic ones. The right assessment of the role of a standard dialect, the appropriate attitude to geographic and social variations, the belief in the value of one's own culture and vernacular, all these factors are crucial to promote and/or increase the wish to learn Standard English as the desirable uniform tool of communication in the United States. All other implications are to be excluded. With only linguistic aspects to consider, the instructor's role seems to be more akin to that of a person who teaches English to native speakers. A number of TESOL oriented drills should of course be incorporated in the approach in order to build into the learner's mind the set of restructured and reordered rules and to achieve the desired automaticity in the response. Hence, a limited use of second language teaching methodology appears appropriate to cope with the specific problems of a non-standard English speaking learner. However, the major emphasis should be placed on the fact that the speaker of non-standard English is, after all, a native speaker of the language, who rather than seeking competence in a language unknown to him wishes to acquire new ways of performing in the same language.

Notes

[1]Punya Sloka Ray, Language Standardization, Janua Linguarum, Series Minor, Mouton & Co., 1963, p. 11.

[2]William Labov, The Study of Non-standard English, ERIC Clearinghouse for Linguistics, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969, p. 24.

[3]William Labov, The Study of Language in its Social Context, (unpublished), 1969, p. 62.

[4]William C. Ritchie, "Some Implications of Generative Grammar for the Construction of Courses in English as a Second Language," Language Learning, Vol. 17, 1/2, 3/4.

[5]William Labov, The Study of Non-standard . . ., p. 39.

[6]Ibid., p. 40.

[7]Ibid., p. 9.

[8]Ibid., pp. 40, 46.

[9]William C. Ritchie, op. cit.

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1. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO TYPES OF SPEECH ACQUISITION: ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES AND STANDARD ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF A NON-STANDARD DIALECT

A. Difference in motivation

The speaker of another language usually wishes to function adequately in a Standard English speaking environment, whereas the speaker of another dialect may and often does not see the reason why he should adjust linguistically to the environment of a different social class.

B. Difference in the perception of Standard English

The speaker of another language does not comprehend Standard English, nor any other variety of English for that matter, whereas the speaker of a non-standard dialect seems to have usually no comprehension problems.

C. Difference in the social significance of Standard English

The speaker of another language does not correlate the target language or dialect with the social class of its speakers, whereas the speaker of a non-standard dialect sees in Standard English a set of speech patterns that, like a shibboleth, mark the speaker as member of an alien social group.

D. Difference in the cultural heritage and in its influence on man's identity and self-respect

The speaker of another language is the product of a different culture and his identification with his culture gives him self-respect, whereas the speaker of a non-standard dialect is often unable, for reasons beyond his control, to clearly understand his cultural heritage, a fact that may affect his identity and make him underestimate the adequacy of his vernacular.

E. Difference in the source as system

The native speech of the speaker of another language is a linguistic system that is, regardless of any genetic relationship, totally independent from English, whereas that of the speaker of a non-standard dialect is not an isolated system but rather a subsystem of the English language.

F. Difference in the deep structures

The speaker of another language must build into his mind the deep structure of English in order to acquire mastery of the target language, whereas the speaker of a non-standard dialect already possesses the main body of English deep structure and is only expected to make some adjustments to it in order to become conversant in Standard English.

G. Difference in matters of performance

The performance in Standard English by the speaker of another language will result from the learner's acquisition of deep and surface structure rules as well as of an appropriate lexicon, whereas the performance in Standard English by a speaker of a non-standard dialect requires only the adjustment of a few deep structure and of a larger number of surface structure rules whose internalization permits him, not to speak a new language, but to shift to a different dialect.

2. Cortland Project in English Sociolinguistics - Correlation between basic aspects and curriculum

Aspects	Curriculum	Description
Psychological	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (in part) Teaching Standard English to Speakers of Other Dialects (in part)	Motivation, perception, production
Sociological	Language Variations in American English with Emphasis on Social Dialects Field Methods in Sociolinguistics	Language variations in general - specific data from dialect geography - social dialectology and its methods
Cultural	Ethnology of the Negro in the New World Races and Minorities	History of the Black culture from its African beginnings to the present day - Minority problems in America
Linguistic	Grammatical Analysis of American English Seminar in the English Language	Theoretical background in English linguistics with attention to major grammatical theories
	Grammar of English and Spanish	Contrastive study of English and Spanish for those interested mainly in the Spanish speaker
	Directed Study	Research in TESOL or SESOD
Methodological	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (in part) Teaching Standard English to Speakers of Other Dialects (in part)	TESOL methodology and the extent to which it is applicable to SESOD Techniques only applicable to SESOD
	Language Testing for TESOL and SESOD Teachers	TESOL testing testing techniques and their applicability to SESOD